

The Crying That Is Not Hers to Fix



Nussbaum Mind

Illustration coming soon

Ages 12-15



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Chapter 1: The first job

On Tuesday afternoon, Chavi stands outside the door of the apartment next to her own.

It is her first babysitting job. Mrs. Lerner asked her yesterday, and Chavi said yes before she could think about it.

Now she thinks about it. The toddler inside is named Leibel. He is two years old. Chavi has never watched a child alone for more than ten minutes.

Mrs. Lerner opens the door with her coat on. "He had lunch and he is in a good mood. I will be at the dentist for an hour. I wrote the dentist's address on the fridge, and you know where we live. You are next door to your own mother, which helps."

"I know," says Chavi.

Chapter 2: The door closes

Mrs. Lerner kisses Leibel, says "Be good for Chavi," and leaves.

The door clicks.

Leibel looks at the door. His lip begins to shake. Then he cries, loud and round, with his hands in fists.

Chavi freezes.



Chapter 3: Everything she tries

She tries the block tower. Leibel pushes it over and cries harder.

She tries a song. Leibel cries over the song.

She tries a cracker. He throws it.

She picks up a toy truck and rolls it across the floor. He does not look at it.

Chavi thinks: I am bad at this. Mrs. Lerner should have asked someone else. Then she thinks of her mother next door. Knocking would be allowed. But first she wants to check one thing.

Her face gets hot. Her hands feel useless.

Chapter 4: The thought she catches

Chavi checks the ordinary things first. His diaper is dry. He is not hot or hurt. He ate lunch an hour ago. Nothing is wrong that she can find.

Then she sits on the floor, a little away from Leibel, and breathes.

She notices what she is telling herself. If he is crying, I am failing. If he is still crying, I am failing more.

She asks herself a question. Is that true? Is he crying because I am bad at this? Or is he crying because his mother just left and he is two?

Chavi does not know for sure. But the second one sounds more likely.



Chapter 5: A different job

Her mother once told her something about feelings. When a child is safe and has what he needs, you do not have to make a feeling stop. You can stay with it. And if something is wrong, or you do not know, you get a grown-up.

Chavi shifts closer to Leibel. She does not pick him up, yet. She sits near and says, quietly, "You miss Mommy. She is coming back. I am here."

Leibel cries.

"You can be sad," she says. "I will sit with you."

She stops trying to fix. She sits.

Chapter 6: The quieter crying

After a few minutes, Leibel's crying gets softer. It goes in waves. He looks at her between waves.

Chavi holds out her arms. He climbs into her lap, hiccups and rests his head on her shoulder.

They stay like that. Chavi hums one slow line of a song, without trying to make it work.

When Leibel's breathing slows, he points at the truck.

"Truck," he says.

"Truck," says Chavi. She rolls it. He watches.



Chapter 7: Mrs. Lerner comes back

An hour later, Mrs. Lerner opens the door and Leibel runs to her.

"How was it?" she asks.

"He cried a lot at first," says Chavi. "Then he calmed down. I mostly sat with him."

"That is exactly right," says Mrs. Lerner. "Thank you."

Chavi walks the few steps to her own door. Her hands are steady. She thinks about the crying that was not hers to fix, and the sitting that was.

She writes one line in her notes: Check needs first. If he is safe and fed, stay with the feeling. If it is more than that, get the grown-up next door.



Job order

Number the cards in story order.

Chavi arrives for her first babysitting job next door.

Mrs. Lerner leaves and Leibel begins to cry.

Chavi tries a tower, a song and a cracker, and none of it helps.

Chavi asks herself whether his crying means she is failing.

Chavi sits near Leibel and says she will stay with him.



Fact or thought?

Mark FACT for what the story shows happened. Mark THOUGHT for the story Chavi tells herself.

Statement	FACT	THOUGHT
Leibel cries after the door clicks.	☐	☐
I am bad at this.	☐	☐
Leibel throws the cracker.	☐	☐
If he is crying, I am failing.	☐	☐



Fixing or staying

Choose the sentence that stays with a feeling. Rewrite one other sentence in your own words.

Sentence	Stays with the feeling?
☐ You miss Mommy. I am here.	
☐ Stop crying right now.	
☐ You can be sad. I will sit with you.	

One sentence in your own words



Steady sitter

Draw a path through the moves that help a sitter stay steady.

Start

Check needs, then sit nearby.

Say the baby must stop.

Ask whether the thought is true.

Say you are here.

Decide you are failing.

Get the grown-up if something is wrong.

A steady, safe response



My sitter notes

Use a fictional sitter. Write three things that help when a child is upset.

A fictional sitter and child

Three things that help

Who is reachable



Staying words

Read the reminders with an adult. Choose one that fits. Final stickers are 2 1/4-inch squares.

**Needs first,
then stay**

**Crying is not
failing**

You can be sad

I am here

**Not sure? Get
the grown-up**

Ask if it is true



Truck on the floor

Draw a toy truck on a rug beside a block tower that has fallen over.



A detail I add to the rug or blocks



Find the sitter words

Find LEIBEL, TRUCK, BREATHE, STAY, SOFT, WAVES, MOTHER, DOOR. All go left to right. Tell one word's part in the story.

L	E	I	B	E	L	X	Q	Z	B
X	T	R	U	C	K	M	D	F	G
Z	B	R	E	A	T	H	E	K	H
Q	S	T	A	Y	B	V	D	W	N
X	S	O	F	T	Q	M	Z	P	G
B	W	A	V	E	S	Q	D	F	G
X	M	O	T	H	E	R	Z	M	C
D	O	O	R	X	B	N	M	Z	P
P	Q	M	Z	X	W	V	B	D	F
C	B	N	M	K	X	Q	Z	P	D

LEIBEL**TRUCK****BREATHE****STAY****SOFT****WAVES****MOTHER****DOOR**

One word's part in the story



Parent notes and answers

Discussion questions:

What did Chavi try first, and what happened?

What did she tell herself while Leibel cried?

What question did she ask herself about that thought?

What did she do instead of trying to fix the crying?

What did she write at the end?

Parent tool: Young children often cry when a parent leaves, and it does not mean the sitter is failing. Staying calm and nearby is a real job. Check basic needs first (dry, fed, not hurt or hot) and get the reachable adult for any health, safety or practical problem or if unsure. Staying with a feeling applies only when the child is safe. Do not promise a feeling stops on a schedule. A sitter needs a reachable adult and clear instructions. Use fictional examples only.

1. Listed order 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

2. FACT: Leibel cries after the door clicks; he throws the cracker. THOUGHT: I am bad at this; if he is crying I am failing.

3. Staying: You miss Mommy; I will sit with you. Fixing: Stop crying right now.

4. Useful nodes: Check needs, then sit nearby; Ask whether the thought is true; Say you are here; Get the grown-up if something is wrong. Not useful nodes: Say the baby must stop; Decide you are failing.

5. Open. Example: stay calm, say what you see, keep a grown-up reachable.

6. Open. No result is promised.

7. Open. No people needed.

8. LEIBEL: row 1, column 1, right; TRUCK: row 2, column 2, right; BREATHE: row 3, column 2, right; STAY: row 4, column 2, right; SOFT: row 5, column 2, right; WAVES: row 6, column 2, right; MOTHER: row 7, column 2, right; DOOR: row 8, column 1, right